

IN THE CLAIMS:

Cancel claims 2-4, 26-28 and 49 without prejudice or admission.

Kindly amend claims 1, 9, 17, 29 and 30 as follows:

1. (Twice Amended) A near-field optical probe, comprising:

a cantilever formed of a transparent material and having a first main surface and a second main surface opposite the first main surface;

a base supporting the cantilever at the first main surface;

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a tip extending from the second main surface of the cantilever and having a microscopic aperture at an end thereof, the tip being formed of a transparent material having a higher refractive index than that of the transparent material of the cantilever to increase an amount of near-field light generated or detected by the microscopic aperture; and

a shade film formed on the second main surface of the cantilever and on a surface of the tip except for the microscopic aperture.

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9. (Twice Amended) A near-field optical probe according to claim 7; wherein the lens comprises a gradient-index lens.

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17. (Twice Amended) A near-field optical probe comprising: a cantilever having a first main surface, a second main surface opposite the first main surface, a fixed end, a free end opposite to the fixed end, and a convex portion disposed on the second main surface, the cantilever being disposed at an inclination angle θ_1 relative to a surface of a sample; a base supporting the cantilever at the first main surface; a tip having a height H and extending from the second main surface of the cantilever and having a microscopic aperture at an end thereof, the convex portion of the cantilever being disposed at a position closer to the fixed end of the cantilever than to the tip, and a height of the tip being greater than a height of the convex portion; and a shade film formed on the second main surface of the cantilever and on a surface of the tip except for the microscopic aperture; wherein when a radius of a light spot on the cantilever resulting from light incident on the tip or light detected by the microscopic aperture and being incident on a detector is R1, a distance L1 from a center of the tip to a free end of the cantilever satisfies the equation $R1 < L1 < H / \tan \theta_1$.

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29. (Twice Amended) A method for manufacturing a near-field optical probe, comprising the steps of: forming a step portion on a substrate; providing a transparent member on a first main surface of the substrate; etching a part of the

transparent member to form a tip in the vicinity of the step portion; forming a mask on the transparent member covering the tip and etching the transparent member using the mask to form a lever; etching the substrate from a second main surface opposite to the first main surface to form a base; and forming a shade film on the lever and on the tip except for an end portion of the tip.

30. (Twice Amended) A method for manufacturing a near-field optical probe, comprising the steps of: forming a step portion on a substrate; burying a weight material to be used as a weight portion in the step portion; providing a transparent member on a first main surface of the substrate; etching a part of the transparent member to form a tip; forming a mask on the transparent member covering the tip and etching the transparent member using the mask to form a lever; etching the substrate from a second main surface opposite to the first main surface to form a base; and forming a shade film on the lever and on the tip except for an end portion of the tip.

IN THE ABSTRACT:

Delete the abstract now of record and insert therefor the new abstract submitted herewith on a separate sheet.